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ABSTRACT

A review of the status of English language instruction in Hungary begins with an overview of the role of English in the society in general, and outlines the status of English use and instruction in the educational system at all levels (preprimary, elementary, secondary, higher, vocational, adult, and teacher), the characteristics and training of English language instructors, the type and availability of instructional materials, educational administration and planning in relation to English teaching, English outside the educational system, British and other international support, commercial opportunities related to English instruction, creative writing, language research, and other sources of information. English is the most popular of the second foreign languages taught in schools and to adults, and many of its students reach a proficiency enabling them to read scientific texts. While the teaching is satisfactory, instructors are often weak in spoken and colloquial English. New intensive language programs, plans for English-medium schools, and the high level of usage of English-language resources are encouraging signs of continued strength for English. (MSE)

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English Teaching Profile

Hungary
June 1987

1 Role and status of English

Hungarians are encouraged to learn foreign languages in order to minimize the isolating effects of speaking only Hungarian. English is taught in Hungary as a second foreign language: the first foreign language is Russian. All children in secondary schools learn Russian, while English is one of the foreign language options only in the gimnàzium. Among the older generation, German is more widely used, but students of English now outnumber students of German at the secondary and tertiary levels.

Salary incentives are offered for English proficiency and, in the scientific world, papers published in English can bring a financial bonus. This applies also to other languages. Currently, there is a huge upsurge of interest in learning English, particularly among young people. English is used as a medium of instruction in the university English departments, and in some medical, town planning and architecture schools.

Though many Hungarians read English books in the original for pleasure, they remain a minority, albeit a growing one. The journal Nagyvilàq regularly carries reviews of English books and translated excerpts from them. The New Hungarian Quarterly, covering the cultural and educational fields, is published in English, as are certain other official publications e.g. Hungarofilm Bulletin. Hungarian authors very rarely write in English.

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2 English within the education system

Pre-primary and primary education

It is rare to find English taught to pre-school children, though a few primary schools in the second cycle (10-13 age group) run voluntary language classes (five lessons a fortnight). A new nursery school experiment in English Language Teaching (ELT) was started in 1987.

Secondary education

There are three kinds of school: the gimnàzium (the equivalent of grammar school, for the 14-18 age group), the secondary technical school (Szakközèpiskola - also for the 14-18 age group) and the secondary school for vocational skills (Szakmunkàskèpzö Iskola).

About twenty per cent of secondary school pupils go to a gimnazium and of these about seventy per cent go on to university. The gimnazium offers the most academic type of secondary education. Russian is the first foreign language and pupils may choose one other, usually English, French or German, studied for three lessons a week. In 1986, 35,000 pupils studied English. The second foreign language is taught for two years with an option of studying the language an extra two hours a week for the subsequent two years. The final examination (èrettségi) is the minimum qualification for university entrance.

About 4,000 children attend a secondary school for vocational skills, where the course lasts two or three years. No English instruction is offered.

As a new development in 1981, eleven grammar schools were chosen to offer intensive English for eight hours a week instead of the usual three. In 1987 five English-medium secondary schools are to be set up: the British Council is to assist in the development of three of these. The first two are due to open in October 1987, the other three in 1988. There is great interest in these schools and it seems likely that competition for entry will be strong. They will have a 'zero year' of pure ELT before learning all the subjects on the Hungarian curriculum in English. It has been decided that British ELT textbooks will be used in these schools, supplementing Hungarian texts.

English textbooks in a given type of school are geared to the syllabus followed in that school. Syllabuses and textbooks for the various kinds of secondary school are controlled by the Ministry of Culture and Education, although recent legislation has given far more leeway to teachers' use of supplementary materials. In higher education these responsibilities are delegated to the teaching institutions, who print their own textbooks and materials, importing British books only as far as their budgets allow. English teaching in Budapest schools is inspected by two inspectors based in the Pedagogical Institute in Budapest (FPI) (Fövarosi Pedagogiai Intézet). One or two inspectors of English operate in each county. Inspectors base their reports on the effectiveness of English teaching in a school rather than on individual teachers, but they can recommend in-service training where they see a need for it. English inspections must take place every three years.

Tertiary education

English is studied with one other subject for five years for a joint degree: the last year is a teacher-training year. There are English Departments at the Universities of Budapest, Debrecen, Szeged and Pècs. English Departments exist in two teacher-training colleges, Ho Shi Min in the town of Eger, and the College of Foreign Trade in Budapest, an important institution for English teaching. English is also offered as an optional subject at the specialized

universities of agriculture, economics and medicine in Budapest, and of medicine in Szeged. There are additional salary incentives for those who take English as an option and pass the state language examination.

It is not uncommon to find large numbers of students in the pure and applied sciences studying English for the first time at university, although they rarely achieve a high level of proficiency.

In tertiary education, four Hungarian universities offer English as a main subject (see above). The number of students studying English in these universities is approximately 1,000. A knowledge of English literature from Old English onwards is part of the syllabus, and is closely related to the teaching of the language. As students are expected to read many texts, they often read in translation. A critical study of one text in depth is rare, as only a wide, superficial knowledge is required.

There have been a number of reforms in the Hungarian education system, but as far as English is concerned these have affected only teaching materials (see section 4).

English examinations in the state sector

There are state examinations in English, at intermediate and advanced levels, conducted by the Centre for Further Training in Foreign Languages. Success can lead to increases in salary or language allowances. British-based examinations, such as the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE), are rarely used, though one of the International House schools may shortly become a Cambridge Centre. In addition, English Language Testing Service (ELTS) tests are conducted by the British Council.

English is not a formal requirement for university entrance, and only twenty-five per cent of school leavers speak English at pre-intermediate level.

Teacher-training

Teacher-training is carried out in a number of ways:

1 Pre-service and in-service English teachers in secondary schools are qualified to teach through their five-year English degree course at university, of which the fifth year is devoted to pedagogic theory and teaching practice.

2 English graduates from teacher-training colleges (a four-year course) are qualified to teach English in primary schools.

3 There are also part-time in-service training courses for twelve participants, lasting for one year, one day a week, which are run by the FPI.

4 Similar courses are organized by the National Pedagogical Institute (OPI) (Orszagos Pedagogiai Intézet). The OPI differs from the FPI in dealing with the professional interests of teachers working outside Budapest.

There are three national summer courses for teachers of English. The British Council, through the Cultural Exchange Programme, provides a Director of Studies, lecturers' books and materials for two of these, one lasting for two weeks, for teachers at primary level, and one lasting three weeks, for teachers at secondary level.

Apart from the teachers' trade union, there is no association for English teachers, although some teachers of English attend the international meetings of the International Association for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL). An IATEFL branch may be set up in the future.

Vocational

Overall there is widespread provision for adults to learn English, although English cannot be learnt by correspondence and there are no opportunities for distance learning. The English courses at TIT (Tudomànyos Ismeretterjesztö Tàrsulat) are mainly evening classes. The Centre for Further Training in Foreign Languages (Idegennyelvi Továbbkèpzö Központ) has teaching as well as testing functions, e.g. one-year courses of evening classes at nine hours a week, mostly for privately funded students. Several ministries (e.g. Ministry of Foreign Trade) offer special English language training to their officials. Among the many privately or co-operatively run language schools in Budapest are two which are affiliated to International House, London. These employ some native-speaker teachers. Despite their high fees, these schools always have to turn away applicants. Such is the demand for the English language, their teachers are better paid even than their colleagues at universities.

English for specific purposes (ESP)

Students may do a postgraduate interpreters' course lasting either one or two years. Technical universities and the Karl Marx University of Economics offer ESP courses, although not with great expertise.

Radio and Television

Some use is made of broadcasting. For example there are English programmes (although these are not extensive) on radio and television. They include the BBC TV series 'Follow Me'. Foreign feature films on TV are dubbed into Hungarian so they provide little opportunity for hearing native speakers.

3 Teachers of English

In the country as a whole, the supply of teachers does not meet the demand because most teachers want to work in the capital. The majority of English teachers are women who, because they are paid very low salaries, have to supplement their income with private lessons or other work.

There are four Council-appointed British university language assistants or 'lektors', and one school teacher. Three or four expatriates married to Hungarians work in universities or teacher-training colleges as locally engaged lektors. In addition there are some British teachers working in private language schools (although the number is minimal). Altogether, International House Budapest (IHB) and International House Language school (IHLS) employ between ten and fifteen native speakers.

The British Council also runs in-service teacher-training courses: the primary course runs for two weeks and the secondary one for three weeks.

As noted in section 2 there is no established professional organization for teachers of English.

4 Teaching materials

All textbooks produced for schools are authorized by the Ministry and published in Hungary. Foreign-produced materials may be used if they complement the

official textbooks as will be the case in the English medium schools. Reforms in the education system now allow teachers at primary and secondary level to choose their own supplementary teaching materials.

Imported British books are available, but they are much more expensive than Hungarian books: Oxford University Press (OUP) has just signed an agreement to produce some of their ELT books in Budapest. University students use British libraries extensively.

Materials written and produced within universities are widely used, and there is increasing use of cassettes. Hungarian textbooks often have accompanying cassettes recorded by native speakers. The use of films is limited, for logistical and other reasons, but an increasing number of schools is now using video. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is not widespread, but is growing fast, with a particularly strong research and development centre at Debrecen University.

A wide range of English literature is available in translation at very low prices.

5 Educational administration in relation to English teaching

The Minister of Culture and Education is responsible for the provision of public education, including universities. It is within the minister's authority to determine admission, curriculum, and the writing and publication of textbooks. The administration of primary and secondary schools is in the hands of county or city councils. There are in addition a few charitable foundation schools: Roman Catholic, Jewish and Reform.

The Ministry of Education National Pedagogical Institute (OPI) acts as a research and in-service training centre for the whole country (except Budapest which operates its own in-service training - see section 2). OPI organizes annual summer schools for language teachers, including the British Council summer schools. The inspection of schools is the responsibility of local councils. Subject inspectors are usually schoolteachers, who teach eight to ten hours a week in addition to their work as inspectors.

6 Development and planning of the teaching of English

The importance of Western foreign languages is being given increasing recognition by the authorities. New guidelines have meant smaller classes and revision of textbooks.

7 English outside the education system

New regulations permit the establishment of private schools, which have mushroomed since 1981. The best known of these are the Babylon Language School, IHB and IHLS. The last two are affiliated to International House London. A permit must be obtained before a school may be opened but there is as yet no inspection system. Many teachers of English offer private lessons in their homes.

8 British support for the teaching of English

The following support is provided under the Cultural Exchange Programme:

- Four lektors and one schoolteacher (Benefit, contracted by the British Council). The local salary is paid by the Ministry of Culture.
- One ten-month scholarship in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) to a Hungarian university teacher of English.
- Two five-month or one ten-month bursary for English studies.
- One place on the Cambridge English Studies Seminar.
- The provision of five TEFL specialists for annual summer schools in Hungary.
- Material support for two of the annual summer schools (see section 2, teacher-training).
- Twenty-two awards annually for Hungarian trainee teachers of English to attend three-week courses studying teaching methods in Britain.
- Twenty places for Hungarian students at institutions of higher education in Britain to study English language, literature or language teaching methodology.
- Support material from the library: 11,500 books, cassettes, records, posters.
- A series of film shows in the British Council Auditorium once a week from October to April; weekly attendance 150-200.

There is no Direct Teaching of English nor any possibility of it as yet.

9 American support for the teaching of English

This is a limited operation. There is, however, considerable support for scholarships to the USA through the Soros foundation. (The Soros foundation was set up by an Hungarian-American to support Hungarians training in Hungary or in the USA). Soros, however, does not fund ELT training within Hungary, but only allows Hungarians to follow ELT training in the USA. Overall there are more opportunities to study in the USA than in Britain. America provides no lektors but does fund one Fulbright professor annually, who usually covers American literature. The USA Embassy has a small lending library, holds one annual summer school for Hungarian teachers of English, and holds a two- week, secondary teacher-training course. There are friendly relations between the British and USA cultural sections.

10 Other agency support

Nil

11 Commercial opportunities

Commercial opportunities are very limited, the main difficulty being the shortage of hard currency. A few Hungarians, particularly those with relatives in Britain, attend private schools of English in the UK (information supplied by the local British Council library); but there is little potential for an extension of this.

12 Creative writing

Nothing is produced in English by Hungarians but much is available in translation. There is a Hungarian Association of Writers and an active Poets, Playwrights, Essayists and Novelists (PEN) club, both with close international contacts. PEN invites at least one British writer or playwright to Hungary every year. Most educated Hungarians read some English novels either in the original or in translation. There are no literary prizes for works in English. Hungary has an excellent publishing system and produces high quality books at low prices. Some agreements exist between Hungarian and British publishers; Deutsch, Longmans, OUP, Phaidon, and Hurst (inter alia) have local contacts, but arrangements are made on an ad hoc basis.

13 Current research

Research in English language and literature is undertaken in the English departments of universities. These are not team projects but are undertaken by individuals, mainly in literature and linguistics. There is little work in methodology. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences, through the post-doctoral degree it offers (kandidatus), also provides a framework for lecturers who wish to continue their research. The library facilities of the University National Library and the Academy of Sciences are very good.

Links with foreign institutions are informal and related to student exchanges rather than research (see the annual awards in English studies listed in section 8). There is no register of research projects.

14 Bibliography and sources of further information

Information is to be found only in legislation, regulations and schedules; there is nothing easily extractable or highly relevant. There are no relevant annual reports, commissions or reviews.

There are few recent books or articles, and those which exist are written in Hungarian. A useful review, by Miklos Kontra, of English and American studies in the 1970s, (written from the viewpoint of a university lecturer with American experience) was published in 1980 as the first volume in a series of Papers in English and American Studies, by the University of Szeged (Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila Jozsef Nominatae).

15 General statement

Although Russian is the compulsory foreign language in schools, English is the most popular of the second foreign languages offered in the gimnàzium, followed closely by German. This covers only twenty per cent of the secondary schools however. Pupils attending secondary technical schools (thirty per cent) find they need English when they are at the university, and undertake language tuition on a semi-voluntary, ad hoc basis. Many reach a standard which enables them to read scientific texts. The large enrolments for English at adult education classes, and the extensive use made of private schools and teachers, indicate the interest in English among adults. On the whole, teaching in schools is satisfactory, but teachers display weaknesses in spoken and colloquial English. Few have spent a lengthy period in an English-speaking country and there are few opportunities to hear the native speaker, even in the mass media. A most encouraging development, however, has been the introduction of intensive English at eleven specially chosen grammar schools (see section 2). Pupils in these schools are taught by the best teachers and reach a high standard of proficiency in two years. Plans for new English-medium schools promise further improvement.

The shortage of hard currency in Hungary and the cost of living in Britain mean that very few Hungarians can spend their holidays or join language courses in Britain. Professional people in the pure and applied sciences, although they learn English late, often reach high standards through frequent attendance at international conferences, for which funds are available from official sources. The British Council's library has 25,000 visitors a year, and the average age of these visitors is thirty. There are 11,500 books in the library, 2,000 of which are in ELT. In addition there are 480 cassettes in ELT. ELT magazines kept in the library are also popular. Approximately thirty people a day come to the library to watch videos. The library also has a separate selection of forty sets of ELT text books for the sole use of the British Council lecturers. The capacity audiences at the weekly film shows are highly encouraging, as is the large number of children (usually from the professional classes) whose parents pay for them to have private lessons in English at the primary and secondary school stages. Even though English is not a first foreign language but an optional second foreign language at the gimnàzium level only, the outlook is not gloomy.